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TWELVE

Hagar on My Mind



AZIZAH Y. AL-HIBRI

A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

I am an American Muslim immigrant. I come from an ancient corner of the world—the Middle East. My history goes back a few thousand years, for I am a descendent of Hagar, the mother of all Arabs. As years pass by in these United States, I find myself reading about Hagar, imagining her face, her hands, her life, her emotions. An Egyptian princess alone in the hot Arabian desert, twice an immigrant, with a crying infant and no food or water, not even breast milk to nurse. I close my eyes and feel the dry sand of the desert in my mouth. I hear Hagar running between two hills looking for water, food, people, anything. Seven times she runs back and forth. Her act is called *sā'i* in Arabic. It literally means to make an effort. You would think that one round of *sā'i* would have been more than enough to reach the inevitable conclusion—she was in trouble with no one in sight. But Hagar was an obstinate woman of faith who knew that in the end God would come through for her. He did, and thousands of years later I was born of her seed.

When I was in Lebanon, I lived a double life as a young woman. At home, I lived in highly religious surroundings, because I come from a house of learning and religious leadership. At the American University of Beirut (AUB), I stuffed my scarf in my briefcase and had American coffee with my classmates in the Uncle Sam restaurant. Two very different worlds that I tried very hard to keep apart, but in each I was privileged. At home, I was the descendant of major scholars and was seen as having inherited some of

This chapter was written before the events of September 11. Much has transpired since then, but it was too late to incorporate it into this essay.

their spiritual transparency. At the University, I had a rich modern uncle with a ridiculously expensive car and a chauffeur who often picked me up with my friends to spend the day at my uncle's chalet at the beach. My world was complex and contradictory, but whatever stress it placed on me, it never prepared me for the life of an immigrant.

I came to the United States to continue my higher education. As a result, my life suddenly changed. I faced serious challenges to my core values, to my dignity. I was emotionally shredded to pieces and thrown into the abyss. Till this day, I remember the departmental parties I attended when I began teaching in the seventies, and a certain colleague and senior administrator. He always reeked of alcohol in the afternoon. At parties, he held a drink in his hand and moved closer and closer to talk. Suddenly, the space would shrink and I would be backed slowly against the wall. "Be generous," he would whisper before I could wiggle out from my tight corner. One day, he stopped me to inquire: "I heard from the department secretary that you ordered an electric pencil sharpener for your office." "Yes," I answered, "the secretary told me it was not that expensive." He looked amused, then said with a grin: "Why don't you just order a manual one and hire an Arab to turn it? That would be much cheaper."

I turned to my feminist sisters. I remember around that time writing an article for a feminist socialist book. The latter half of the article was about the relationship of Marx and Lenin to the women in their lives. I had been introduced to Marxism only a few years earlier and was very proud of the research I had done. I had no agenda. I simply wanted to research and write about the topic. As it turned out, Marx in particular was a miserable male chauvinist. The article was accepted for publication, subject to the deletion and replacement of the part on Marx and Lenin. I was told to stick to writing about Arab women. Clearly, some Marxist feminist women did not want to destroy the image of their two patriarchal heroes, or take me out of the pigeonhole they assigned to me.

During that period, I remember lying in bed awake many nights. At times, tears ran down my cheeks like glittering sand particles from the beaches of Beirut. Then I would feel Hagar touching my shoulder, softly whispering: "You are an immigrant now, like me. You are all alone in this distant desert. Wipe up your tears. Get up and do your own *sati*. Run between these strange hills. In the end, God will be with you." Hagar was right, and this immigrant never gave up.

Luckily, I had the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) to help me make an oasis in my desert. They were the finest group of women I ever had the privilege of working with in this country. A crazy bunch of women. We were crazy, because we would silence no one, and all ideas were placed on the table. There were no taboos, no restrictions on freedom of speech, no

authority, but a great deal of honesty, love, and respect. When some of us violated these standards consciously or subconsciously, we stopped everything, discussed the problem and resolved it. Yes, some women viewed me as “exotic,” but they loved me anyway. They listened to me. They embraced me with their thoughts and actions. I was no longer alone. These were the days SWIP asked me to become the founding editor of *Hypatia*, the first journal for feminist philosophy in the United States. I, the immigrant with the funny accent, was chosen by these brave women to give birth to our very special baby. I did and it lives till this day. Hagar, I am sure, is proud.

In the years that followed, I left teaching to go to law school and then to Wall Street before I returned to teaching. During that period, a lot had changed. I tried to get back into the feminist movement, but it was very different. There were now NGOs that went abroad and to the United Nations trying to mold the world in their own images. These were not the struggling anti-Establishment, anti-Patriarchy groups of the early seventies. These were “in” groups, heavily financed and backed by both the Establishment and Patriarchy. As I held the hands of Muslim women around the world and listened to their problems, I became more aware that the financing offered to some of them by American feminists was tied to a specific agenda. I realized then that I was looking at a new breed of American “feminists,” women using feminism to achieve patriarchal goals.

My heart was, of course, broken. I thought of all the good times I had shared in the past with some of these women. I knew them personally. Decades earlier, we had held hands and sung feminist songs together, and we cried together. I wondered whether that old bond of sisterhood would not help them see what they were doing. I hoped that if they could see themselves through my Third-World-sensitive eyes, they would reform. So, one bright spring day in Washington, I stood at the podium of one such organization and spoke. The whole program was about Muslim women’s rights. It was in preparation for the UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing. I was told that all the presentations would be published in a book to be distributed there. The major administrator of the organization was from my corner of the world, but every other leader of the organization was decidedly homegrown, as was the agenda. I looked at the audience. There were many women with head scarves, looking silenced and disempowered. I felt they needed my voice and I decided to speak for them. After all, wasn’t the whole conference about their rights?

I turned to my old friends from the movement and reminded them of the basic principles of feminism: rejection of patriarchal and all other hegemonic hierarchical structures. I reminded them of our days of struggling together, of the good times and the bad times. I explained Islam to them from a feminist perspective, quoting the Qur’an. I reminded them of the

pernicious effects of cultural imperialism and asked them to re-examine their current hegemonist behavior in the international arena. When I was done, my feminist friends sat eerily still, while the head-covered women rushed to the podium to thank me. My speech, they said, was the first in two days to address their concerns at the event. They had been rendered voiceless through a careful selection of speakers.

A few months later, I received a letter from the administrator of that organization informing me that the final version of my presentation was due in about a week. She also informed me that if I wanted the article to be published, I had to change the content. I responded by asking her about the concept of free speech. She invited me to exercise it in some other publication. This past year, I finally did just that when I published my response to Susan Okin, titled "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?"

Hagar, I am still on track. I am continuing my *sati*. There will be water, there will be milk, and we, women of the trying desert, shall live and prosper for thousands of more years to come.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS REFLECTIONS

I am a logician. I love the certainty of a precise answer. I used to sit for hours solving problems for fun. Then I decided to apply logic to ethics. My system of deontic logic was "neat." It avoided all the pitfalls and paradoxes of earlier systems. But the only part of my system I ever used in real life was the foundational discussion on whether obligations conflict and what can we do about them. I have not been able to reduce a single ethical dilemma in my life to a set of premises with a precise conclusion. In a way, I look at my deontic logic as an exercise that keeps me in good ethical shape. It does not take me all the way to my answer, but certainly helps me avoid elementary mistakes.

I also dabbled in the philosophy of science and loved it. I loved all these theories about the world and the related measurements and paradoxes. This, I thought, was the real metaphysics. It told us about the real world. I was thus shaken when in the end, I discovered scientific as well as feminist critiques about the relativity and subjectivity of science. Science, it turns out, was about one more system of constructs masquerading as Reality itself. It works well for now, so we embrace it. It gives us power over nature, over others, so we idolize it. It has become the new religion in a world where hegemony is a primary value.

But then there were Marx and Hegel. My Marxist professor taught me about the "Early Marx," about Marxism with a humanist face. He denounced the repressive Soviet bureaucrats and their totalitarianism. I was

spellbound, captivated. One wonders how much of the lessons he taught me informed his actions upon his return to his homeland, Serbia. There he became a major architect of the policy of ethnic cleansing. I look back at the old days at the University of Pennsylvania where he taught me. I look back at the many lunches, arguments, walks, even revolutionary music we shared. He was a partisan in Tito's army but had risen, so we were told, against totalitarian rule. He was my hero! My hero turned out to be a mass murderer of women and children. How can you ever go beyond that?

I learned from Hegel about the value of contradiction, and that patience with a text could lead to great rewards. These lessons were very helpful in my later life. Together with my feminist training, they taught me never to dismiss a text too soon, or an idea too quickly. I learned to look for hidden value and not be averse to alien thoughts. Despite appearances, humanity was indeed one, and the Other was I. Suddenly, I could hear the rhythmic chants of the sufis flowing back from the distant streets of Damascus: "Allah Hayy (God is alive), Reality is one."

I was told that God was the opium of the people. I was also told that all those who tried to prove God's existence failed. In fact, this logician went through a whole course of these proofs, dispensing of them one after the other. For my classmates, the failure showed the outrageousness of the belief in a God. For me, it showed the limitations of symbolic logic. Early on in life, I had experienced the world of spirituality and knew it was very hard to capture in a beaker or a formula. I had prayed to God and felt his love around me. I had related to others through that love, and I saw the world differently. We had peace. But as I became more philosophically educated, I was becoming conflicted, lonely, disillusioned, betrayed, unhappy. The theories I was applying in my own life, of unbridled materialism and secularism, were coming home to haunt me.

I remember a feminist discussion group where women spoke about the emptiness they had in their lives. Curiously, they reported that this emptiness was accompanied by the feeling of a hole in their bodies. It was right there in the middle of their chests, under their bosoms. It was painful, empty, and getting larger. Many of us agreed with that observation. I, too, had developed this hole, this painful sense of emptiness. It was a new feeling in many ways, and I hated it. All these theories had succeeded in doing was to rip me away from my intuitions and my heart. They impoverished the nature of my relationship to others and condemned me to a one-dimensional existence after which I would collapse into dust. The modern technological society had given me a mechanical heart, and it was tired of beating. I had no ancestors, no traditions. I did not have a history that extended thousands of years. Hagar was just one hapless woman. I, on the other hand,

lived for the moment and was holding the whole world in my hand, with a gaping hole in my guts.

One night, I drove my Mercedes into the rain. There was a heavy Texas storm. I could not care less. The pain in my guts was too intense. I could not see the road. So what? I could crash and things would come to an end. I was young and attractive. I had a good job and lots of friends. But the hole kept getting bigger. The tears kept running down my face. The car kept moving faster on the highway. Then it occurred to me that I was given by God this valuable gift of life, this talent. I should not be an ingrate. I wiped my tears and went back home. A few days later, I woke up in the early morning and did a very primitive thing—I fell on my knees and prayed. Immediately, I felt the peace come back. I was whole again.

But how could I, a feminist, accept a patriarchal God who created me inferior to men? How could I submit to authority when I had fought it half my life? Had I truly lost my mind in exchange for spiritual peace? The answer is the rest of this story.

WEAVING THE STRANDS OF MY LIFE TOGETHER

It was hard to return to my faith if only because in my youth it was used to restrain me. I remember hearing repeatedly that the Qur'an states that men are superior to women. My choices, movement, actions, had all been restricted, and all in the name of religion. In the end, I had decided to leave it all and find my own way in life. Coming back to my faith was, therefore, a profound decision.

But you never cross the same river twice. The next time around, I was a mature and independent woman, a logician no less. I had seen the world and had lost my naïveté. I had seen good ideas poorly applied and insightful statements distorted. Through sheer obstinateness, I had retained my full knowledge of the classical Arabic language, the language of the Qur'an. Understanding that Islam has no ecclesiastical structure, I decided to read the Qur'an directly for myself. That would not have been the first time. As a child, I studied it with a sheikh for years. This time, however, it was different. I immersed myself in my project with a great deal of enthusiasm and hope. I did not have to work very hard before my efforts were thoroughly rewarded.

I remember a quiet summer afternoon on my family's estate in Maryland. The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Sheikh Hassan Khalid, had come to the Washington area during the holy month of Ramadan to collect donations for the orphaned children of Lebanon. He was the guest of my family that afternoon. We strolled on the grounds talking about many issues,

mostly religious ones. At one point, he turned to me and said, “Study the story of Iblis (Satan) in the Qur’an. It is most instructive. Iblis disobeyed God because Iblis believed that he was better than Adam. His arrogance caused his downfall. Examine that Iblisi logic in our modern context. For example, when a person thinks he is better than another because of money or race, isn’t he engaging in Iblisi logic?” Soon thereafter, Sheikh Hassan Khalid was blown to pieces in Beirut by a car bomb.

The words of Sheikh Hassan Khalid echoed in my mind. I went back to the Qur’an. I read ancient commentaries, and I reached a very important conclusion. Islam has no ecclesiastical structure because it does not support any innate hierarchies, except that between Creator and created. The Qur’an is clear. All of us, males and females, nations and tribes, were created from the same *nafs* (soul, spirit). The claim that Eve was created from Adam’s rib is not in the Qur’an, the primary source of Islam, at all. The Qur’an says repeatedly that women and men are created from the same *nafs*. I was dumbfounded! Doesn’t the Qur’an say, however, that men are superior to women? Isn’t that the refrain every Muslim woman hears daily?

I turned to the famous Qur’anic verse only to discover that the word “superior” is not even in it. Another word, *qawwamun*, is part of the verse, and most male jurists have *interpreted* it to mean superior. This is not the place to analyze that verse. I have done that elsewhere. But it turned out to be a verse that imposed *limits* upon men of ancient times who believed that they could interfere with every woman’s business by virtue of their male gender alone. In fact, elsewhere, the Qur’an again clearly states that men and women believers are (equally) each other’s *walis*, meaning guardians or caretakers. It is a basic rule of jurisprudential interpretation that Qur’anic verses must be interpreted in ways that render them internally consistent. Despite all these verses, men chose to interpret *qawwamun* to mean superior and from that derived significant legal privileges over women.

Worse yet, the male-oriented interpretation appeared to me to fall into Iblisi logic. So, let me recount briefly the story of Iblis. In that story, we are told that God created Adam and ordered Iblis (Satan) and the angels to bow to Adam. The angels bowed immediately, but Satan refused. His reason was simple: How could he bow to Adam if he was better than Adam? After all, Adam was created of clay, while Iblis was created of fire. And isn’t it clear that fire is superior to clay? Satan tells God directly in the Qur’an: “I am better than he is.” This Satanic logic, rooted in arrogance and a false hierarchy posited by Iblis, caused Satan to disobey God and incur his wrath. By disobeying God, Satan also posited his own will as equal or superior to the divine will. He thus violated the basic principle of Islam, namely the unicity of God, and the absolute superiority of God’s will. Iblis thus fell into *shirk* (polytheism).

Based on this story, the medieval jurist al-Ghazali concludes that a rich person who thinks he is better than a poor one, or a white person who thinks he is better than a black or red person, is guilty of Satanic logic. By the same token, I add that a man who thinks he is better than a woman is guilty of Satanic logic. For after all, the Qur'an is clear about the basis for the divine preference of one person over another. It is simply piety.

As I arrived at this conclusion, I started seeing my feminist thought revive and blossom. Having spent two decades rejecting patriarchal hierarchies, it was a relief to see my views affirmed by the Qur'an. At that moment I realized that I had a calling. I was put on this earth both in Lebanon and the United States, in my religious family and in the feminist movement, given talent in the Arabic language, in logic and later in law, so that I could help Muslim women around the world who had become victims of an increasingly patriarchal society. They had been denied their rights in the name of religion, and I had the duty to unmask that monumental deception.

This deception was more monumental than appeared at first blush. Muslim men also had been victimized in the name of religion. Their democratic rights along with those of women had been stripped away, and they were taught that religion expected them to show obedience to the ruler, regardless of how corrupt that ruler may be. The Muslim's right to election and consultation was emptied of all meaning and limited to a favored few in some countries. Those jurists who dared to object, and it turns out there were many, ended up tortured or in jail. The history of Muslim societies turned out to be the history of how secular forces, barely disguised as religious ones, took over the power from the people and the religious scholars. Force was used blatantly in order to sow fear in the hearts of the citizens. So power-hungry were these forces that very early on they massacred members of the very House of the Prophet, killing all but one of his male descendants.

I did not know that. I did not know that Zainab, the granddaughter of the Prophet, shielded with her own body her remaining teenage nephew to save his life. I did not know that Zainab and all the women of the House of the Prophet were forced to march on foot from Karbalá in Iraq all the way to Damascus. I did not know that upon her arrival, Zainab's little sister was trembling in the palace of Yazid, the power-hungry usurper, for fear of being taken as prisoner of war. Zainab publicly comforted her, citing the Qur'an to ensure her liberty. Then in the middle of all the tragic loss, the blood, the palpable fear, Zainab dared to speak out in a hall full of men who dared not speak. She stood up and branded Yazid as an oppressive ruler. She delivered a spontaneous, well-reasoned, and articulate speech, citing the Qur'an repeatedly to denounce Yazid's rule. In the face of Zainab's courage, Yazid bowed his head in silence, perhaps in shame.

Zainab was not an exception. Before that, her mother Fatimah gave her own well-reasoned, defiant speech when her inheritance was denied to her after the death of her father, the Prophet Muhammad. Based on a reported statement of the Prophet, the leaders of the community had argued that children of prophets do not inherit. She refuted these claims with Qur'anic verse, but lost her case anyway in the face of a rampant patriarchy. Before her was her mother Khadija, who seems to belong to our century. Khadija was a wealthy and successful businesswoman. She hired the Prophet when he was still a young man to conduct some business for her. Khadija was so impressed by his honesty and manners that she proposed marriage to him. She was twenty years his senior, and they lived happily until her death.

Further research showed me many other basic facts. The Qur'an itself recognizes the right of the Muslim woman to participate in the political process, yet many Muslim countries continue to prohibit women from that participation. In one instance, the Prophet appointed a woman to lead prayers, yet men continue to question the Muslim woman's right to lead her community. The Qur'an repeatedly praises knowledge, and the Prophet declared the pursuit of education to be the duty of every Muslim, male and female. Yet the Taliban have severely restricted women's access to education. The Qur'an guarantees women a share of the inheritance, yet many women are left destitute when men refuse to give them their due share. I could continue multiplying examples. So, I packed my bags and went around the world to speak to my Muslim sisters.

I discovered both the achievements and misery of many Muslim women. We hear only of the latter in the United States. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, I was told by women that the number of female graduate students far surpassed that of men. Because of affluence in that part of the world, men gravitated to easier alternatives. The educational advantage has opened to the Emirati woman many doors in government, but at the same time, it may have created problems in her personal life. Despite the unfortunate debacle about her voting rights, the Kuwaiti woman has a great many rights and protections. For example, the Explanatory Memorandum to the Kuwaiti Personal Status Code (family law) quotes directly from the Qur'an when it defines the spousal relation as one of affection and mercy. It also follows the Qur'an by making verbal abuse a sufficient ground for divorce!

At the same time, there were deeply entrenched cultural views in various Muslim countries that had been unquestioningly accepted by both men and women as religious requirements. This unfortunate conclusion gave these views and the related laws a power of their own in Muslim societies, which, despite all their shortcomings, continue to value piety. To liberate women,

it was thus important to strip the religious disguise from these views and force the community to re-evaluate the related customs in light of basic Qur'anic principles. How does a woman coming from the United States do that?

My task was complicated by the work already done by American NGOs in some Muslim countries. As I had stated in my suppressed speech in Washington, these NGOs had poisoned the well for Muslim feminists. They were amateurs who took their secular perspective abroad and thought they could change the world with it. Instead, they sowed a great deal of suspicion about the women's rights movement in societies that are deeply religious. Ultimately, some countries closed down NGOs altogether. Traveling again into these territories to defend Muslim women's rights was no small feat. I first had to undo prior damage before I could launch my own project. I understood that nothing could be achieved unless I tried to convince the women, the mullahs and sheikhs (religious scholars), and the legislators of the correctness of my Islamic position. I also decided to focus on one demand at a time. It appeared that the most urgent priority was that of ensuring the Muslim woman a fair marriage contract. The problem, in the United States and elsewhere, was that Muslim women were getting poor settlements upon divorce, often leaving them destitute. That was clearly contrary to Qur'anic teachings, and it had to change.

I leaf through a United States Information Agency (USIA then, now the Office of Public Diplomacy) report of a recent trip of mine it sponsored. It describes vividly one memorable scene at a meeting with assembly members of a Muslim province. I was explaining my views on the marriage contract and seeking support. A sheikh entered the meeting and sat demurely at one end. He was somewhat old with a white beard and probing eyes. He seemed powerless, kind, and soft-spoken. But I immediately understood that if I did not win him over, I would lose everyone. So I directed most of my remarks to him. According to the USIA report, "[a] most rewarding exchange occurred between Dr. al-Hibri and a sheikh, a religious leader, who was invited to join the discussion. He tested Dr. al-Hibri's understanding of the Qur'an during a dialogue in Arabic. Dr. al-Hibri fully won his confidence and the sheikh smiled and touched his heart."

As I was leaving the room, the assembly's secretary shook my hand and invited me to share my final proposals with him. "If your proposals are properly based on the Qur'an," he said, "we would consider revising our laws accordingly." Hagar, I am continuing my *sa'i*.

On another occasion, I met a mullah whose criticism and denunciation of feminists filled the morning papers. I was warned that he might not look me in the face, that he might not shake my hand, and that it would be futile

to talk to him. I took my chances, however, and attended a dinner with him and a group of leaders. Initially, he was extremely formal, polite, and cold. Then the testing process started. It went so well that we turned to a discussion of my views on the marriage contract. The feminists had raised objections to certain consequences of the contract and were demanding change, but they had no knowledge of Islamic law, so they were making secular demands. That is why the mullah denounced them. When I met with some of these women, they explained to me that they were not secularists. They simply wanted change but did not have sufficient Islamic jurisprudential knowledge to know how to go about getting it. I told them that I thought I could help. That evening, I discussed with the mullah my views. I made the same demands, this time based on a thoughtful Islamic analysis. He listened, then he said, "If you can fully articulate a valid Islamic argument in support of this position, I am willing to consider it seriously." One of the supportive men sitting next to him asked, barely disguising his amazement: "Is that a 'yes'?" The mullah confirmed: "Yes."

The American press and feminists make sheikhs and mullahs look like irrational patriarchs. That may be true of many. The real ones, however, understand the story of Iblis very well. It is not their will that counts but God's. God's will is reflected in the Qur'an. If I can show that a certain practice is contrary to the Qur'an or even contrary to the spirit of the Qur'an, the religious person is bound to abandon it. In short, if you want to navigate your way around Kabul, you do not use the map of New York. Western feminists were doing exactly that. Luckily, I had the local map.

At the end of an exhausting summer, I passed by Beirut. I collected my thoughts and reflected on my whirlwind tour of nine Muslim countries. It was a tremendous success. How did that happen? Of course it was God's will. But God had prepared me for this. It dawned on me that finally my training in logic was paying handsomely. Often, the problems I posed to leaders at meetings were quickly disposed of by easy responses. I then tactfully exposed each response as inadequate. At that point, a more serious answer was proposed, only to be again disposed of. I had thought of all these answers long before I left the United States. None of them worked. My logical arguments, based on Qur'anic knowledge, soon won me the attention of those I was meeting. In the end, they either came up with valuable serious answers or gave up and asked me for my own. In each case, we achieved rapport, and they exhibited a great deal of respect and friendliness as I left the room. A very few evaded the challenge by promising to mail me the answer soon. I am still waiting for those.

So, after all these years, the lessons I learned and taught in class about argumentation, refutation by counter-example or otherwise, fallacies, and even *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* helped in my very concrete task of ad-

vancing the rights of women and promoting human rights. It is funny how the wheel of life turns. Who would have guessed?

Additionally, I could not have done all of this without my legal training. Logic helps me map my arguments properly. Law on the other hand makes me understand the complex subject matter I deal with. Islamic law is a combination of logic, law, and religion. It has evolved over fourteen hundred years, and many outstanding jurists have considered every single issue of their time. To introduce a feminist dimension to this tradition is to tread on very thin ice. How can I possibly measure up to those outstanding thinkers, such as al-Ghazali, Abu Hanifah, and Malik? My task, however, turned out to be less daunting than I originally suspected. These great thinkers themselves often supplied me with the arguments or views I needed. I said they were great thinkers, didn't I? All I needed to do was to revive some of their views, recast others, and deconstruct yet others. Law and logic, what a great combination!

The crux of this approach lies in the fact that Islam celebrates diversity. Based on this fact, Muslims jurists permitted the introduction of local customs into Islamic law, so long as these customs did not contradict it. As a result, Muslim cultures prospered. It is a basic tenet of Islamic jurisprudence that though Qur'anic principles remain absolute, laws change with changes in time and place. For this reason, when Imam al-Shafi'i immigrated from Iraq to Egypt, he revised his jurisprudence to make it more suitable to the culture and circumstances in Egypt. Clearly, then, all these major jurists would be appalled to discover that hundreds of years later, often thousand of miles away as well, we are still stuck on the jurisprudence they formulated for their own time and culture.

We have a duty to revisit this jurisprudence in light of the new historical era and new cultural circumstances in which we live. This is where deconstructing the old jurisprudence to separate its cultural components becomes necessary. Muslims are all bound by every word of the Qur'an, but they are not bound by cultural assumptions or biases. Engaging in Islamic jurisprudence is a whole other type of *sa'i* that Muslim women have to embrace in order to achieve their God-given rights. Very few can. For one, their education generally, and in religion especially, is limited in some countries. Luckily, al-Azhar al-Sharif of Cairo, the oldest Islamic University, has opened its gates to women. A deeper problem arises from the fact that the consequences of colonialism continue to unfold in Muslim countries. Given that many colonialist regimes prohibited the study of Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, and disadvantaged Islamic schools financially, a whole generation of Muslims has grown up without real knowledge of its heritage or religion. Angry with this deprivation, they continue to fight for their faith tooth and nail. Since they do not fully understand the flexibility of

Islam, their defense of Islam often becomes synonymous with the preservation of the status quo. This is why religious re-education is critical for the success of feminism in the Muslim world.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Today, all Muslims who go to Hajj (pilgrimage in Makkah) honor Hagar by repeating her *sa'i* between the same two hills for the full seven rounds. Men, women, and children remember her ordeal with this important symbolic ritual. Then they drink from the waters of Zamzam, the spring that miraculously gushed into existence, saving her and her baby Isma'il from thirst and certain death.

Yes, Hagar is my ancestral grandmother, and I am so proud of that. In a family whose family tree goes back over a thousand years, I know the name of every male ancestor I ever had and often something about his life story. I do not know the names of my female ancestors other than my immediate grandmothers Fihmiyah and Azizah (my maternal grandmother who gave me her name) and a handful of historically outstanding women, some of whom were mentioned in this story. For this reason, Hagar is very important to me. She is the mother of my whole family, the mother of my mostly unknown mothers. I do not know whose hair or eyes I inherited, but I do know that I have Hagar's determination for *sa'i*. It is this faithful *sa'i* that drove this immigrant female to study religion, logic, law, and feminist theory, to fight for other women around the world. Now, other women have joined my *sa'i*. Life is so beautiful!

NOTE

The author has chosen not to footnote this essay because of its intense personal nature. However, any information about Islam included herein is discussed more fully in the author's published articles and speeches. Many of these speeches can be found on the website of the organization the author founded, Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, www.karamah.org.